



# Psychiatric Tales: Eleven Graphic Stories About Mental Illness

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## **Psychiatric Tales: Eleven Graphic Stories About Mental Illness** Darryl Cunningham

*Psychiatric Tales* draws on Darryl Cunningham's time working in a psychiatric ward to give a reasoned and sympathetic look into the world of mental illness. In each chapter, Cunningham explores a different mental health problem, using evocative imagery to describe the experience of mental illness, both from the point of view of those beset by illness and their friends and relatives. As Cunningham reveals this human experience, he also shows how society's perceptions of and reactions to mental illness perpetuate needless stigma, for example, the myth that schizophrenic people are more likely to commit crimes than non-schizophrenic people. *Psychiatric Tales* is a groundbreaking graphic work; it deftly demythologizes and destigmatizes the disorders that 26.2 percent of American adults live with every day.

Concluding with a reflection on how mental illness has affected his own life, Darryl Cunningham's *Psychiatric Tales* is a moving, engaging examination of what is, at its root, the human condition.

Darryl Cunningham is the creator of the Web comics *Super-Sam* and *John-of-the-Night* and *The Streets of San Diablo*. He is a prolific cartoonist, sculptor, and photographer, and lives in Leeds, England. This is his first book.

## **Psychiatric Tales: Eleven Graphic Stories About Mental Illness Details**

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Author : Darryl Cunningham

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**Darryl Cunningham**

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## **From Reader Review *Psychiatric Tales: Eleven Graphic Stories About Mental Illness* for online ebook**

### **Amber Lea says**

This is really simplistic and at times repetitive. I was hoping for more humor and insight. I either wanted there to be more personal stories, or more exploration of mental illness itself. Overall it was a bit bland and shallow, but I still read it all the way through because it's like...the ambient music of comic books. It was like going on a slow meandering walk through someone else's brain.

(Of course, as someone who worked at a pharmacy for eight years, none of these stories shocked me. But if you're not used to dealing with the mentally ill, you might not feel the same way about this comic.)

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### **Molly says**

A collection of short, graphic stories about working with the mentally ill. Really awful drawing style- even though he showed signs of potential with the chapter on famous people with mental illness, which makes it even worse. (I just hate that crude, blunt drawing style that seems to be popping up all over the place lately. Anyway.) The stories were all pretty unpleasant and didn't really open my eyes to any issues of mental health. I wouldn't really recommend this to anyone.

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### **Sesana says**

Not exactly what I'd been hoping for. I'd been hoping for some insightful looks at people with mental illness, but this isn't really that. Most of the chapters are really superficial. And I'm not a big fan of the art style. I suppose it's meant to read as simple, but it just looks simplistic, and amateurish.

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### **Paul Bryant says**

This book is tiny. 175 pages, read it in one hour. It's like a beginner's guide to the most common mental illnesses and even though it's on lots of best-graphic-novelly-things which is why I got it, since I'm an ignorant blunderer in the garden of comix, I wasn't knocked out. We get chapters on dementia, self-harming, depression, personality disorder, schizophrenia and bipolar. A definition, the currently recommended treatment, a quick character sketch of a patient encountered by the author, and on to the next.

### **GO VASCULAR**

A very close relative of mine had vascular dementia so that ailment is one I know about. It was quite a kindly dementia, there was no hostility, no distress, it was just like a long fade-out on a favourite record. She gradually lost the ability to form words but she was quite happy to chat away in *approximate sounds*, to which we had to nod along and smile. The incomprehensible vocalising had the exact same timbre as a real

conversation, her voice rising and falling and emphasising some sounds – somewhere in her mind she was making perfect sense, and – strangely – so were we when we talked to her about the weather or ourselves. If it wasn't so peculiar and distressing it would have been poignant and almost funny, like something out of Gormenghast. She never noticed that anything was amiss. It went on for months like until eventually the strange non-conversations petered out and she lapsed into silence. And soon after that the kindly gentlemen with the black cloak gathered her up.

So if you're going to get dementia, go with vascular, that's my tip.

## STIGMA

Mr Cunningham's book is mostly a polemic against stigmatising mental health sufferers, and this is of course a very good thing, but it shirks confronting a very real problem. He says :

*We don't tolerate racism and sexism these days, but people with mental health problems are still fair game. Mockery, discrimination and stigma persist, despite research showing mental illness to be as real as any other illness.*

I thought that was a strange thing to say. Who doesn't think that mental illness is "as real as any other illness"? Who needs any research to prove that? Is he talking about a coven of Szasz and R D Laing followers who deny that there is such a thing as insanity? No, I think he means the regular public, who sometimes aren't sympathetic.

*Many people still believe mental illness to be a failure of character and self-discipline* he complains. What he doesn't address is that mental illness is not black and white, it's the ten thousand shades between, and it's hard for many people to spot that *this person* is a wild and fun-loving type who sometimes burns out and gets depressed, but *that person* has bi-polar; *this person* is a self-indulgent whiner who everyone tiptoes around, but *that person* is suffering from depression. It's hard enough for the professionals to give a definite diagnosis sometimes, so the general public may be forgiven for not immediately medicalising their fellows. So yes, sometimes people are still told to snap out of it when they can't.

As opposed to people stigmatising mental health, in some sections of society many people are very keen to pathologise their own behaviour, such as those involved in the addiction industry. And check this quote from an essay by the prison doctor Theodore Dalrymple – it's from one of his essays :

*Another burglar demanded to know from me why he repeatedly broke into houses and stole VCRs. He asked the question aggressively as if "the system" had so far let him down in not supplying him with the answer, as if it were my duty as a doctor to provide him with the buried psychological secret that, once revealed, would in and of itself lead him unfailingly on the path of virtue. Until then he would continue to break into houses and the blame would be mine.*

## THE LAST CHAPTER

Is called *How I Lived Again* and recounts DC's own painful struggles with anxiety and depression, which ended his career as a psychiatric nurse. When I read that, I thought – you know, I really shouldn't be saying such critical things about this book – look at what this poor guy went through.

But ... in an unexpected way, the new Goodreads rules came to my rescue. I have to put all thoughts about the author out of my mind and just, you know, *concentrate on the book*. Thanks for the reminder, Goodreads.

If it wasn't for you I would be feeling like a right bastard.

## **TEN GREAT SONGS ABOUT MENTAL ILLNESS**

Cracking : Suzanne Vega

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r99jp...>

Like the Weather : 10,000 Maniacs (sorry, that's the name of the band)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=624gY...>

Boys of Bedlam : Steeleye Span

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OZwVE...>

Sleepy man Blues : Bukka White

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iqnU-...>

19th nervous breakdown : stones

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wU1kT...>

Love in a faithless country : Richard Thompson

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-htvF...>

Like a monkey in a zoo : Vic Chestnutt

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZVMJO...>

Feel : syd barrett

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kjIHF...>

Thank You : Brian Wilson

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RPbpk...>

Cloud my sunny mood : Dan Hicks

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2LMvI...>

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## **Sofia says**

### **Published on my book blog.**

I got this book as a birthday gift from two dear friends of mine. We share many interests, and the workings of the human mind is one of them, so they figured this book would be a good match for me.

It's a good premise. The author spent a few years working as a health care assistant in a psychiatric hospital and draws on his experiences to tell short stories about mental illnesses. Unfortunately, I didn't like it as much I thought I would. I was hoping for an insightful look into this fascinating, often misunderstood world, but I felt that all the stories were superficial, with the exception of the author's own tale (the last story in the book). Many of the "stories" didn't even feel like stories at all, more like a textbook description with pictures accompanying it. I couldn't understand the constant mention of how people need to be more open-minded and tolerant towards mental illness. What's the point of saying that to a reader who is interested enough to try this book?

I can definitely see a heavy influence from Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood*, both in graphic qualities and narrative, but this book lacks the profundity and poignance that "Persepolis" has. Moreover, sometimes I felt like the drawings didn't even need to be there at all.

However, there were some positive points. The author's story was powerfully told (made me wish that the rest of the book was like that) and some of the personal stories of the patients he mentions are genuinely strange and interesting.

This is an ok book, and it's fairly interesting, but I do wish it dared to go deeper.

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## **Vanessa says**

This book has the potential to be a great collection but it doesn't quite get there. The descriptions of the illnesses read like simplistic medical definitions. I think this would have been a lot better if each of the stories were written from the perspective of someone with the illness instead of someone who oversaw somebody suffering from it.

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## **Matt Wilson says**

I read *Psychiatric Tales* by Darryl Cunningham. In this book Cunningham talks about his experiences working in a psychiatric hospital. He shares information and experiences from the different types of wards that he worked in. I enjoyed this book because Cunningham uses it as a platform to educate the public about different types of mental illness and put to rest different myths and stereotypes that many people think of when they hear about a mental illness. For example, Cunningham explains that people with schizophrenia are normally not dangerous, and that they themselves are more prone to being attacked because they don't fit in with society socially as the rest of us do.

As far as characters go Cunningham is really the only one who is there constantly throughout the book. He is sort of there in the experiences that are being recalled, but at the same time narrating. Cunningham is a likeable guy, and as a reader you feel bad for him at the end of the story. He talks about his own fight with

mental illness and depression and how he viewed himself as worthless and not smart enough for the job that he wanted. The art in here is essentially black or white, no shading, but it is extremely detailed. Cunningham uses detail to show some of the horrors of the thing that happen inside of psychiatric wards, he even diagrams a brain at one point. I personally liked this book and thought that it taught an important lesson about mental illness. I would recommend it.

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### **Andrew says**

"understand the trials of both sufferers and those connected to them" - That pretty much sums up the book. Its a series of tales told by some guy who worked with the mentally ill. He wants the mentally healthy to appreciate mentally ill people, not be afraid of them, and accept them.

That's a noble cause, but it makes for a dull book and the book doesn't go beyond that attempt. I suffered from mental illness (psychosis, for lack of a more precise term, or lack of wanting to elaborate) for a short period a few years ago (Not to suggest that I'm fully recovered, I think mental illness will always be in effect, and a full 'relapse' is always a fear). I really wanted this comic book to be about the 'trips' that occur - I wouldn't mind writing a comic about my experiences.

Instead of something really fascinating, this is a book concerning an outsider writing about the external realities of people having mental illness symptoms (I wanted to simply write: 'with mental illness', or even better: 'the mentally ill', but I want to shy away from defining those people by their illness. They are not the illness, they just experience it.) - I'm a big fan of Erich Fromm, the psychologist, and how he always says mental illness is defined in relation to the norm, and is significant to the extent that it prevents the person from productive interactions with society (ie, having a job).

Anywho, I think that mental illness sufferers suffer because of how they are treated - to a great extent, but not completely - and this book suggest how the suffering can be reduced by us non-sufferers "understand[ing] the trials of both sufferers and those connected to them".

If you've read this far, you don't need to read this book - go read a real book on mental illness while wearing your empathetic boots.

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### **Andrés Santiago says**

One of the most beautiful comic/graphic novel I have ever read. It is informative, sensitively done and very personal. It stays with you long after you read it. I hope this guy keeps making comics, he is one to follow...

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### **Kate says**

The concept of this book sounded interesting, but it wasn't quite what I was expecting. I had expected 11 stories about various patients the author/artist had worked with as a psychiatric nurse. Instead I got a brief overview of several types of mental illness (depression, schizophrenia, bipolar, etc) with several examples within each chapter (not full stories, but rather "I once worked with a patient who..."). It read more like a

textbook in graphic novel form, telling about symptoms and stressing how mental illness should not be stigmatized. The final chapter told of the author's own struggle with mental illness.

Since I have a bachelor's in psychology, this book did not tell me a whole lot that I didn't already know. I find mental illness and psychiatric hospitals fascinating and I felt like some of the examples could have been fleshed out to full stories, and that would have interested me more. I'm not sure who would be a good audience for this book, since the information is really too general for an audience of mental health professionals, and I'm sure a lay person curious about mental illnesses would not seek this book out to learn about them.

I did think the stark black and white illustration style worked well with the subject matter, keeping the tone from getting too heavy as very serious things like suicide and cutting were discussed.

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### **Jennifer Siddiqui says**

This book is based on the authors experience working in different psychiatric wards as a nursing assistant. I enjoyed learning about all the types of mental illness, but felt the book lacked depth regarding facts relating to all the different type of psychiatric disorders.

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### **Daniela Ark's Bookiverse says**

I wish you could give negative stars here in GR!

Right from the introduction, which is an explanation about why the book exists, the book came across cold, detached and distant.

I took me one chapter, [dementia ward] which was only nine pages long to profoundly hate this book.

I was deeply disgusted.

I cannot believe the blurb says that this was “ a reasoned and sympathetic look into the world of mental illness”???? I have NEVER read a more, superficial, egocentric, disrespectful, utterly unsympathetic depiction of mental illness in my entire life.

**I FOUND THIS BOOK COMPLETELY DEHUMANIZING!  
PEOPLE WITH MENTAL ILLNESSES ARE HUMANS BEINGS.  
THEY ARE MUCH MORE THAN JUST THEIR SYMPTOMS!**

It reduces patients to a list of “disgusting” or “weird” behaviors. Most of the first chapter was about how patients didn't now how or didn't want to use the toilet and did their business in the hallways... **AND THE CHAPTER ENDS WITH A PATIENT WALKING AWAY EATING THE POOP OF ANOTHER PATIENT "like a chocolate bar"!** That was LITERALLY the term used to described a very sad moment in a PERSON'S LIFE. That is what the first chapter was about!

**It was vile, degrading, cruel, and just disgusting!**



What I found more dangerous about his book is that, according to Cunningham, it's intended to motivate people to work in the mental health area! I would never want anyone to treat mentally ill people like this!

Daniela Ark

Bookworm, book blogger, writer, collector of stories that matter and passionate about diversity and equality [especially feminism!].

email: contactme@danielaark.com

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## **Melina Souza says**

Esse livro é um conjunto de histórias curtas sobre as experiências do Darryl Cunningham enquanto trabalhava como enfermeiro em um Hospital Psiquiátrico.

São 11 histórias curtas divididas em: 1. Dementia Ward; 2. Cut; 3. It could be you; 4. Darkness; 5. Anti-Social Personality Disorder; 6. People with mental illness enrich our lives; 7. Blood; 8. Bipolar Disorder; 9. Schizophrenia; 10. Suicide; 11. How I lived again.

Acho extremamente importante produzir conteúdos para educar a população sobre saúde mental. Ainda há muito preconceito em relação a isso por conta de falta de informação.

Enquanto Darryl contava sobre suas experiências, ele fazia observações extremamente importantes como "auto-mutilação não é só para chamar atenção" (tradução livre) entre outras coisas que, infelizmente, estamos acostumados a escutar em relação a pessoas que têm diagnósticos de transtornos mentais.

Não é, como imagino que muitas pessoas que leram o livro esperavam, um guia super detalhado visando explicar de forma didática alguns transtornos mentais. Ele dá, sim, algumas explicações, mas é focado mais em sua experiência com alguns pacientes.

O que me incomodou um pouco foi a forma com que ele relatou alguns pacientes, pois acho que pode passar a impressão errada para quem não tem conhecimento na área de que todas as pessoas com o diagnóstico x vão se comportar dessa mesma forma. Cada pessoa é única e a forma com que algum transtorno/distúrbio/doença vai afetá-la é única. Como alguns casos relatados são meio chocantes, tenho receio de que isso pode ter um efeito contrário ao que ele queria quando escreveu o livro.

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## **Braden Boudreau says**

Braden Boudreau

Ms. O'Brien-Yetto

English 9H

1/23/18

Review of Pyschiatric Tales by Darryl Cunningham

Pyschiatric Tales by Darryl Cunningham is a graphic novel of him telling stories about mental illness, he used to work as an assistant on a psychiatric ward for many years and is also a cartoonist so he made this book to take away the ignorance on mental illness and show how it can affect people.

Onto the graphic novel itself, I thought it was a very well-done novel and I enjoyed it a lot, it covers a lot

of serious topics but still makes it interesting with the way it is told and the cartoons added in which I believe are essential to the tales. The first story, and one of my favorites is about dementia. It is a very serious disease and I feel for the family's affected but it fascinates me on the science side of things. You have these completely normal people that over time completely forget who they are and what their life has been like. People imagining they are at sea or not remembering what a bathroom is. And in severe cases eating other humans feces like it was a Hershey's chocolate bar.

Another story that was rather sad was the one about self-harm labeled "Cut". I don't want to talk too much about it because it is really sad but it was nicely done by the author, saying "An act as serious as this reveals a deeply disturbed human being in need of help. Yet people who cut are often seen as timewasters by the very people employed to care for them." This is a great quote and it really sheds light on the better care needed for these people. Some people see acts such as cutting yourself as a cry for attention but it is a serious thing. While regular people think this the people in charge simply cannot and it was a good job by the author to recognize this.

The novel was structured nicely with its sequential stories and was always interesting to pick up and read if my internet wasn't working or if I was just bored. I gave it 4 stars because it was a great book but a book/reading has to really engross me to get 5 stars. It definitely expanded my knowledge on numerous diseases and I feel more prepared if I need to talk about them.

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### **Kate Stericker says**

I was initially apprehensive about reading this book, since the cover and the blurb gave the impression that it might take a voyeuristic/sensationalistic tone and recount the stories of mentally ill people in a way that was intended to be unsettling. However, I found the author's narrative voice honest and understanding, and it's clear that his intention with this book is to debunk false beliefs about mental illness and humanize those affected by it. As someone experienced with mental illness and related literature, the book didn't contain a lot of new information for me, but I think it would be very valuable if more people were exposed to this kind of educational content with a personal slant.

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### **Hadrian says**

A personal and quite revealing look at mental illness and how people endure or suffer through them.

Mental illness is a serious business, and anything and anyone that treats those who suffer from them with dignity and respect deserves praise. The art conveys the feelings very well. Recommended.

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### **Dov Zeller says**

I was so looking forward to reading this but once I picked it up it didn't take long for me to reach my limit of tolerance. The stories are not considered and explored in a way that I found interesting or satisfying and instead it just feels like Cunningham is in pedantic lecture mode. Raina's GR review got to a lot of my feelings about it, but she is more generous in her assessment, which I appreciate. Here is a quote from her review:

"Generally, though, this felt very didactic to me. The anecdotes or 'stories' of Cunningham's experience generally take up less than half of each chapter, with statements teaching the reader about mental illness filling up the bulk of the book. Which would probably be helpful to a lot of people who haven't been exposed to many mental illness issues. But to me, it sometimes came off as a zine version of a 'be sensitive to people who struggle with this' tract."

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### **Raina says**

I'm really glad this is shelved in nonfiction in my library system, because it totally is. Although the subtitle prepares you for short stories, they're really just short chapters discussing a different illness or illness-adjacent issue.

The art is really lovely, don't get me wrong. As Cunningham says in the last chapter, he's especially great with cityscapes.

Generally, though, this felt very didactic to me. The anecdotes or "stories" of Cunningham's experience generally take up less than half of each chapter, with statements teaching the reader about mental illness filling up the bulk of the book. Which would probably be helpful to a lot of people who haven't been exposed to many mental illness issues. But to me, it sometimes came off as a zine version of a "be sensitive to people who struggle with this" tract.

Maybe it's a geography thing. Maybe England is more suppressed about these things than amerika. Personally, though I'm by no means an expert, I'm fascinated by the many ways our brains can be wired and have therefore sought out books, movies, and other media on this topic. I also have friends who are open about their struggles. So I feel like there was very little new information for me.

I appreciate the effort in this, the struggles Cunningham went through as he worked his way through it. I found his personal story (the last chapter) to be the most compelling part, and I wish that the book had had more of an overarching narrative, perhaps integrating his story with the informational bits, with more detail about each of the individual stories contained within.

I'd especially have liked to see Cunningham discuss how it felt to work in a facility while struggling with his own mental health. Was he diagnosed before? Or did interacting with the patients give him insights into his own conditions?

The art really is beautiful, though.

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### **Lisa Vegan says**

I picked up this book and I didn't put it down until I'd finished it. Luckily, it's a really quick read. I was able to fully appreciate the graphic form of these stories. I admire the author for trying to describe mental illnesses to potential readers who might not otherwise understand them. I think, given the brevity of the

work, he does a reasonably good job accomplishing what he intended to do. It's hard for me to determine if readers knowing nothing about mental illnesses will be even close to adequately educated if they read this book, but it would be a start.

I enjoyed these graphic stories., both the stories and the art. They're an entertaining and somewhat effective way to describe and take the stigma away from various mental illnesses. The author-artist describes patients he met while training to become a mental health nurse. The account became emotionally powerful when, in the last section, he describes his own difficulties with depression and anxiety, and how he was able to cope and thrive despite these illnesses. Everything from dementia to anti-social personality disorder to schizophrenia to self-harm to bipolar disorder, to depression, etc. is covered.

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## **Rowan Smith says**

I read "Psychiatric Tales" by Darryl Cunningham. This was great. I usually don't like to read books, but I didn't want to put this book down. This book is about events that occurred while the author was working in a hospital for mental illness.

I enjoyed how the format of the book was a graphic novel. This makes the book more entertaining and pleasing to the eye in my opinion. I feel like the points that Darryl Cunningham was trying to make in his book were better understood since there were pictures. I also like how the author of the book related to it at the end. Him relating to the book gave the book much more meaning. Next, I like how the author used characterization. Every person he talked about in his book he described, and he talked about what happened to them. An example of this is, "She was naturally very upset, there was one particular tragedy about this patient, as she was still young". This quote shows how he describes the characters. In this quote alone he described a character as being upset and young. Him describing characters helped me get an understanding of each person in the book.

In conclusion, I enjoyed this book. I enjoyed this book because it was a graphic novel, the author related to the book, and the author used characterization so I knew about every person in the book.

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